Aesthetic Principles of Abhinavgupta and Hegel: A Comparative Study

(With Special Reference to *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Gitanjali*)

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Aesthetics is a discipline which deals with the concept of beauty. The *Online Oxford Dictionary* defines aesthetics as something which is "concerned with beauty or the appreciation of beauty" (oxforddictionaries.com/definition/aesthetics). Beauty, the aesthetic parameter, is defined as "something, someone, some feeling or thought to which our mind attaches with reverence" (Kapoor 232). Beauty does not refer to perceptible form but to the essence of things. Plato says "beautiful things are beautiful whether they appear or not" (Kapoor 238). A mind of a human being can easily distinguish between beauty and ugliness. They are formed in our minds through our experiences, upbringing, education and culture.

The aesthetic experience is different from the ordinary experience as it evokes an emotional state of deep tranquillity with accompanying joy. S. Radhakrishnan defines aesthetic experience as "perceiving the essence to perceive bliss" (Patnaik 5). An ordinary experience may be similar for two people, but an aesthetic experience is subjective and varies from person to person. Aesthetic experience is involuntary and impartial. A reader or spectator cannot control the aesthetic experience. It is impartial too in a sense that a spectator or a reader does not view, hear or taste the aesthetic object with some personal interest. For example, a lover of paintings would take aesthetic pleasure while looking at some rare piece of painting but a collector of paintings may view the same painting with a desire to own it. In such a case, the collector takes an economic attitude towards the painting, but does not perceive it aesthetically.

Fine arts have a potential to give rise to an experience that no other product of nature can give. Universal human conditions find expression in art which makes it

aesthetically rich. “Art carries the potential to be a source of pure bliss; therefore art is a pointer towards the ultimate reality” (Patnaik 4).

The theory of aesthetics has a rich history in the East as well as in the West. Aesthetic theories in India date back to the Vedic period. However, according to the scholars, there was no systematic treatment of aesthetics until Bharata’s *Natyasastra* was written. *Natyashastra* aims to answer the questions about the link between literature and aesthetic enjoyment. The relationship between *rasa* (“essence”) and poetry was systematically treated for the first time in *Kavyalalnkara* written by Bhamaha. Another important theory associated with Indian aesthetics is the theory of *dhvani* (“suggestion”) given by Anandavardhana in his well known book *Dhvanyaloka*. Subsequently, Abhinavgupta gave his aesthetics theory. He defined aesthetic experience as “a relish or delight, as well as it being a phenomenon which is subjectively experienced” (Pandey 230). Hemacandra, Mammata and Jagannatha were a few successors who also talked about aesthetics but none of their theories outshined Abhinavgupta’s aesthetics. In the twentieth century, discussions on aesthetics resurfaced. Sri Aurobindo contemplated on the spiritual role of art in *The Significance of Indian Art* (1964) which was published posthumously. Rabindranath Tagore in his work *What is Art* (1964) also talked about the importance of creativity in art.

Other than India, in the East, a few countries have developed a definite notion of the role of aesthetics in literature. Japanese aesthetics did not appear in the philosophical lexicon until the nineteenth century. Japanese aesthetics is a set of ancient ideals that include *wabi* (“transient and stark beauty”), *sabi* (“the beauty of natural shine and aging”) and *yugen* (“profound grace and subtlety”). In China, art and literature are

majorly influenced by Buddhism. Li Zehou in his book *The Path of Beauty* (1994) talked about the importance of beauty and aesthetic experience.

Aesthetics in the West found the systematic treatment not before the eighteenth century. The German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten coined the term in his work entitled *Aestheticsa* written in 1739. According to Baumgarten, aesthetics was "a science of sensitive cognition" (Graham 50). Aesthetics as a different discipline developed late in the West but there were many ancient texts which talked about aesthetics. Plato was the first who discussed the relationship between beauty and art. Subsequently, Augustine and Bonaventure came up with their theories on aesthetics in which they emphasized on art as a means to convey Christian doctrine. Later, the German Idealist Movement emerged which emphasized on emotions as an authentic source for aesthetic experience. Immanuel Kant, one of the main exponents of it, wrote *Critique of Judgement* (1790) in which he talked at length about aesthetics. Schiller further developed Kant's views in *Kallias Briefe* (1793) and talked about the purpose of aesthetics. G.W.F. Hegel was a contemporary of Schiller. He for the first time connected aesthetics to fine arts which included architecture, sculpture, painting, music and poetry. In the later part of the nineteenth century, the English Aesthetic Movement appeared whose major leaders were Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde. Pater emphasized on "the love of art for art's sake" (Beardsley 74) in *The Renaissance* (1873). Later, in the early twentieth century the Italian Revival took place with Benedetto Croce as its key philosopher. Croce's aesthetics theory influenced other aestheticians in the twentieth century, such as, R.G. Collingwood and John Dewey.

On the basis of a brief survey, it is observed that aesthetic traditions have remained rich both in the East and the West. Therefore, here an attempt will be made to draw out

the comparisons and contrasts between the aesthetic theories of Abhinavgupta in the light of his work *Dhavnyalocana* and Hegel's concept of poetry as given by him in *Aesthetics.*

Abhinavagupta (c.950-1025AD) was an ardent follower of Kashmiri Shaivism. He was a diligent scholar, and it is believed, that he was blessed with a supernatural talent from his childhood. He was famous for his avid reading and had a voracious thirst for knowledge. Abhinavgupta wrote many religious texts related to Shaivism philosophy. They include *Tantraloka, Tantrasara, Paramarthasara* and *Paratrishika Vivarana*. Besides these, Abhinavagutpa also wrote books on music, art, drama, and poetry. He wrote *Abhinavbharti*, a commentary on Bharatmuni's *Natyashastra* and also *Dhvanyalocana,* a commentary on Anandvardhan's *Dhvanyaloka*.

Dhvanyalocana is a great contribution of Abhinavgupta to Indian poetics in which he has critically examined Anandavardhana's *Dhvanyaloka. Dhvanyaloka* changed the face of Sanskrit poetics by giving the first comprehensive theory of poetics which was *rasa* centric. *Dhvani* theory is a semantic theory and literally, *dhvani* means "sound" or "suggestion" in Sanskrit. Anandavardhana begins by describing the three main types of meaning identified by Indian linguists which are *abhida* ("denotational meaning"); *lakṣaṇa*("connotational meaning") and *vyanjana* ("suggested meaning"). According to Anandavardhana and further argued by Abhinavagupta, the *vyanjana* is the soul of a work of literature and it is always culture-bound and often refers to current social customs, political issues, etc. relevant to the audience. *Dhavni* are of three types: *vastu dhvani* ("suggestion of plot or facts"); *alankara dhvani* ("literary and figurative suggestion"); and most importantly, *rasadhvani* ("suggestion of sentiment"). Abhinavagupta has placed *rasadhavni* as the "highest" aim of poetry which, according

to him, includes both other notions of *dhavni*. Abhinavagupta reiterates and reformulates Anandavardhana's discussion of *rasadhvani* by explicitly stating that *rasa* functions as the ultimate goal of suggestion. In addition, he interrogates the production and location of *rasa* as well as the vital role of the *rasika* in much more detail than his predecessors. Furthermore, Abhinavagupta describes the triple functions of the poetic word which are "structure, lucidity, and beauty" and only words which "display this elasticity of meaning should be employed in poetry" (*Locana* 45). Thus, Abhinavgupta argues that the addition of poetic elements and the use of suggestion in a poetic work must occur in the service of sentiments.

The German philosopher, George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) has left an indelible mark in the field of aesthetics. He was born in 1770 in Stuttgart, Wurttemberg. His major interest lay in metaphysics, philosophy of history, logic and aesthetics. Hegel was influenced by many thinkers and writers, like, Immanuel Kant, Schelling and Schiller.

Hegel in *Aesthetics: Lecture on Fine Arts* (Vol II) has explicitly discussed his concept of poetry. He has placed poetry as the highest form of the romantic arts (music, painting and poetry). According to Hegel, Fine Arts act as a vehicle for the expression of the "absolute truth" (Knox 465). Hegel positions architecture as the most inadequate of the art forms in representing the absolute and poetry as the best form for representing the absolute. Poetry is more capable than any other art in unfolding the totality of an event, a successive series and changes of the heart's movement, passions and ideas. "Poetry is a universal art which can shape in any way and express any subject matter" (Knox 365). In poetry, worldwide human conditions find expression which makes it "the most universal and widespread teacher of the human race" (Knox 366).

Hegel has distinguished prose from poetry on the basis of language. He is of the view that symbols and metaphors add multiplicity to poetry. Poetic meaning is said to be implicit because it is suggested, referred to, or symbolized rather than being actually present in the work. He states that prose is uni-dimensional whereas poetry is multi-dimensional. Ambiguity, metaphor and symbolism are the heart of poetry because they are surrounded by a halo consisting of an indefinite variety of meaning. Hegel was of the view that if poetic expression has to arouse any interest, it must diverge from the ordinary speech and be made something fresh, elevated and spiritual. He also cautions that poetic expression must refrain both from declamatory rhetoric and also from pompous and witty playing with words because they jeopardize the inner truth. Hegel believes that meter or rhyme is absolutely necessary in poetry as the flow of rhythm and melodic sounds of rhyme exercise an indisputable magic on the reader.

The literature review reveals that many of the researches have focused on the theory of aesthetics given by Abhinavgupta and Hegel separately but the comparative study has yet not been attempted. For instance, David Peter Lawrence in *The Disclosure of Sakti in Aesthetics: Remarks on the Relation of Abhinavagupta's Poetics and Non-Dual Kashmiri Saivism* offers observations and suggestions on how the Kashmiri thinker Abhinavagupta understood the relation of his aesthetics on the one hand, and his non-dual, tantric Saiva philosophical and religious theories, on the other. He endeavours to interpret Abhinavagupta's writings in different areas as expressions of a broadly cohesive intellectual system. The paper focuses particularly on Abhinavgupta's reformulations of Anandavardhana's theory of *dhvani* ("suggestion").

Dr. K. Krishnamoorthy in *Abhinavagupta's Integral View of Aesthetic Concepts* highlights how Abhinavagupta was a thinker who went beyond even Anandavardhana

and Bhaṭṭa Nayaka in his aesthetics and how he explained, for the first time, the precise part played by each of the aesthetic concepts in a given poem or play.

Loriliai Biernacki in *Connecting Consciousness to Physical Causality: Abhinavagupta's Phenomenology of Subjectivity and Tononi's Integrated Information Theory* demonstrates methods for linking mind and body. Both Abhinavagupta and Tononi hinge their theories on the phenomenal subjective experience. A comparative study is done to position Abhinavgupta's aesthetics in the present time.

Sunthar Visuvalingam in *Towards an Integral Appreciation of Abhinava's Aesthetics of Rasa* has provided the historical context to clarify the specific expressions found in *rasa* doctrine. The paper focuses on Abhinavagupta's aesthetics theory and emphasizes on his diverse pronouncements in the contemporary world.

Julia Peter in the book *Hegel on Beauty* highlights that while the current philosophical debate surrounding Hegel's aesthetics focuses heavily on the philosopher's controversial 'end of art' thesis, its participants rarely give attention to Hegel's ideas on the nature of beauty and its relation to art. This study seeks to remedy this oversight by bringing Hegel's views on beauty at the centre. Peter argues that beauty for Hegel, like art, is subject to historical development. Her careful analysis of Hegel's notion of beauty not only has crucial implications for our understanding of the 'end of art' and Hegel's aesthetics in general, but also sheds light on the other fields of Hegel's philosophy, in particular his anthropology and aspects of his ethical thought.

Art, Myth and Society in Hegel's Aesthetics by David James returns to the student transcripts of Hegel's lectures on aesthetics, to analyse Hegel's aesthetics theory. David James develops the idea that Hegel was primarily interested in understanding art as an historical phenomenon and, more specifically, in terms of its role in the improvement of

ethical life of an individual. The book thus offers a thorough revelation of Hegel's aesthetics and its relation to ethical life.

William Cocker has written a research paper *Keats, Hegel and Belated Mythography* in the journal published by Duke University Press. In it he has compared the aesthetics of Keats and Hegel in relation to the myths.

Rasa Theory and its Application to Soyinka's Death and the King's Horseman and Girish Karnad's Tale Danda is a study by Manisha Thakur. It endeavours to read Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* and Girish Karnad's *Tale Danda* (1993) through the lens of aesthetics theory propounded by Bharatmuni.

Quest for Spirituality in Gitanjali and Psalms: A Comparative Study, a research paper by Cinthia Jemima, analyzes some of the songs from both the collections and makes necessary generalizations.

Peace and Harmony in Rabindranth Tagore's Gitnajali is a study by Arvind Nawale published in *New Academia*. He analyzes the major themes of Gitanjali. He also sheds lights on the personality of Tagore and concludes that he was a seeker of peace.

The proposed study will also attempt to study aesthetics through the application of Abhinavgupta's and Hegel's aesthetics on the selected texts. Abhinavgupta's aesthetics theory shall be applied on Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) and Hegel's aesthetics principles on Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali* (1912).

Tennessee Williams (1911- 1983) was an American dramatist, born in Mississippi. His *A Streetcar Named Desire* is eleven scenes play set in New Orleans. Blanche Dubois is the protagonist who comes to live with her sister, Stella Kowalski. There is rich use of symbolism and metaphors in the play which adds suggestive meaning to the

play. The play abounds in *Bibhatsam* (“disgust”) *rasa, Karuṇyam* (“compassion”) *rasa* and *Bhayanakam* (“horror”) *rasa* which make the play aesthetically rich. Blanche lives a life of pretence and tries to hide her awful financial status from her sister. The downfall of Blanche stirs fear in the spectators. Towards the end of the play, Blanche emerges from the bathroom; her deluded talk makes it clear that she has lost her grip on reality and has become mad.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) was a Bengali polymath who reshaped Bengali literature and music, as well as Indian art. He became the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913 for *Gitanjali* (1912). He founded an educational institution, Visva-Bharati University, Santiniketan in 1921. Tagore wrote a number of poetry collections, namely, *Gitanjali*, *Fruit Gathering* (1916) and *Crossing* (1918). Tagore was influenced by the mysticism of Vyasa , Kabir, and Ramprasad Sen.

Gitanjali is a collection of poems by Rabindranath Tagore. The original Bengali collection of one hundred and fifty seven poems was published on August 14, 1910. The English *Gitanjali* or *Song Offerings* contains one hundred and three poems and was published in 1912. *Gitanjali* is a confluence of romanticism, mysticism and humanism. Tagore’s poems are remarkable for simplicity and spontaneity, brilliant imagery and originality. According to Hegel, poetry instructs men about “what he is, what is his surroundings and what are the powers which direct him” (Knox 370). Tagore through his poems educates people about the purpose of their existence in the world.

The objectives of the proposed study would be:

1. To define aesthetics and examine its historical background in the East as also in the West.

2. To compare and contrast Abhinavgupta and Hegel as aestheticians.
3. To interpret the selected texts within Abhinavgupta's and Hegel's aesthetic theoretical framework.
4. To examine the relationship between aesthetics and literature.

In the light of the above objectives, the tentative chapter scheme of the proposed work would be as follows:

Chapter I- Aesthetics: An Overview

Chapter II- Abhinavgupta and Indian Aesthetics: A Study of Abhinavgupta's *Dhavnyalocana*

Chapter III- From Theory to Application: Abhinavgupta's Aesthetics in *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Chapter IV- Hegel's Aesthetics Theory: An Analysis

Chapter V- Glimpses of The Absolute in Poetry: A Case Study of Tagore's *Gitanjali* within Hegelian Aesthetics

Chapter VI- Conclusion: A Comparative Perspective

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